

# Basic Facilitation & Facilitation Approaches for Potentially Explosive Public Interactions

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# Training Goals

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- Discuss meeting planning and facilitation concepts and skills
- Discuss key concepts and specific "interventions" for handling difficult people and potentially explosive public situations
- Provide participants with facilitation skills practice
- Discuss how to integrate these skills/concepts into EPA work



# Training Program

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- Session 1: Meeting planning basics
- Session 2: Facilitation basics
- Session 3: Preventing difficulties before they emerge
- Session 4: Intervening to address explosive interactions
- Session 5: Using facilitation skills in agency work



# Session 1: Meeting planning basics

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- Establishing appropriate expectations for the meeting
- Determining participation and representation
- Working with parties before a public meeting or event
- Developing an agenda, ground rules, meeting format
- Reviewing logistics and securing appropriate resources



# Establishing appropriate expectations

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- Confirm goals, needed outcomes, decision processes [if appropriate] with your team and with senior managers:
  - Don't assume everyone is "on the same page"
  - Discuss goals, outcomes, how public input will be used, decision processes, etc. within the Agency
- Identify inconsistencies before moving forward
- Prepare a written statement of goals, outcomes, etc. and get agreement prior to communicating with stakeholders



# Determining participation and representation

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- Discuss participation to ensure that all necessary parties are invited
- Understand your needs for "participation" and "representation"  
- these can be different and need to link to meeting goals and format
- Identify roles/responsibilities for all parties [including your own role] and agree on these roles BEFORE the public event/meeting



# Working with parties before a public meeting or event

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- Engage potentially difficult parties as much as possible during planning
- Continue to communicate with a broad base of stakeholders as well
- Be clear about the purpose of your event
- If you have the flexibility - incorporate needs of other stakeholders as well
- Provide adequate information - in a timely manner - to ensure effective participation



# Developing an agenda

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- Build the agenda around both content and process
  - The more sensitive the meeting the more useful input is from key parties prior to the meeting - seek out input and USE it
  - Carefully consider the format or "process" you use to conduct the meeting - it needs to match up with goals, participation, etc.
  - Include information on meeting goals, outcomes, topics to be discussed, etc. as part of the meeting announcement or invitation



# Developing ground rules

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- Ground rules provide all parties with guidance on how the meeting will be run and how people can constructively participate
- Ground rules are an important tool for the facilitator to use if the meeting begins to become un-manageable
- Develop ground rules - where possible - with input from key stakeholders
- Review and seek agreement on ground rules BEFORE a meeting begins



# Deciding on meeting format

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- Meeting format needs to be compatible with the content to be presented as well as your meeting goals and outcomes
- Be clear with participants how their input will be used; how decisions will be made; how results will be used.
- Communicate clearly with stakeholders - and potentially difficult parties - about content AND the format before the meeting



# Reviewing logistics and securing appropriate resources

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- Discuss resources early-on; spell out the consequences and likely results if resources or planning time are too limited
- Proceed with what you have - but ID the pros and cons of proceeding with limited resources
- Use local resources and partner where possible
- Familiarize yourself with logistics well before the event; intervene if necessary
- Know when it might be appropriate to use outside contractors



# Session 2: Facilitation basics

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- Preparing for your role as facilitator
- Identifying potential difficulties/hostilities
- Leadership style and personal presence
- Skillful listening, record keeping, etc.
- Awareness and flexibility in changing circumstances
- Implementing results



# Preparing for your role as facilitator

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- Come to every meeting as prepared as possible - you are the "guide" for everyone attending the meeting or event
- Seek out every team member who has a role in the event and talk with them prior to the meeting to ensure you both know your roles
- Know what may "trigger" an awkward moment or make a situation escalate
- Do not hesitate to "take a break" when things seem to be going terribly wrong - it is easier to re-convene than recover from a disaster



# Identifying potential difficulties and hostilities

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- Sensitive or potentially controversial meetings require special effort BEFORE the meeting
- Listen for potential problems/difficulties in your pre-meeting planning communications
- Ask what others need; ask what has gone wrong in the past; try to work with parties to address specific concerns or past mistakes
- LISTEN and try to respond with new awareness - don't let old interactions dictate your response



# Leadership style and personal presence

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- Your style and comfort in the role of facilitator affect your ability to manage the meeting
- Understand and prepare for your role as facilitator
  - Do your homework on the content of the meeting
  - Learn about relationships among parties
  - Come prepared to be alert and engaged
- Explain your role as a neutral facilitator; contrast this with your regular position in the Agency



# Leadership style and personal presence

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- Consider how to gain the group's support and ask for their support at the outset
- Work to create an environment that allows all parties to speak honestly about "needs" and get past "positions"
- Your job is to maintain control of the discussion and the group - don't be hesitant to play this role
- Remember you are there to help the group work well and effectively - the meeting is not about you!



# Skillful listening

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- Skillful listening is NOT a passive activity - it is a key ingredient in your success as a facilitator
- Listening "actively" ensures you accurately identify the issues and know how to move the group forward
  - Look for key words, concepts, emotions to help you stay focused and "on point"
- Understanding the real issue is critical to your ability to keep the parties focused
- Making sure all parties are ready to move forward together is essential to the meeting's effectiveness



# Record keeping

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- Understand what type of meeting record is required before you begin facilitating
- Explain the purpose of the meeting record to parties at the outset of the meeting
- Ensure parties understand how the record will be developed and used after the meeting
- Establish a review process for the record or summary before the meeting begins



# Awareness and flexibility in changing circumstances

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- Circumstances can change quickly; be alert to changes; don't be afraid to stop and re-group
- Allow people to express confusion, and seek feedback from the group about how they want you to help them proceed
- Don't try to proceed if the group is not willing to move forward with you
- Seek feedback on your style and performance as the meeting moves forward - with your team or key stakeholders during breaks



# Implementing results

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- Do you have an agreed-upon and accurate "action items" list at the end of your meeting
- What do you need from decision makers, meeting sponsors, and participants to ensure success in implementing results
- What is your role, if any, in followup
- Do not leave the meeting without answers and agreement on these items



# Session 3: Preventing difficulties before they emerge

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- Preventing hostile or difficult situations
- Understanding and trying to address stakeholder needs
- Dealing with hidden opposition
- Knowing how and when to change course to address difficulties



# Preventing hostile and difficult situations

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- Many problems can be avoided by advance planning:
  - Pre-meeting communications with difficult or hostile parties
  - Addressing sensitive issues you know exist - through the agenda or in direct discussion prior to the meeting
- Work with your team before the meeting to anticipate potential "tough" questions or difficult emotional issues - have a strategy
- Make sure that your room setup, logistics, and your entire team are prepared for a worst case scenario



# Understanding and trying to address stakeholder needs

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- Understanding what stakeholders want/need and where you cannot meet identified needs, within the context of the meeting, explain why
- Try to find a different forum or a different way to address needs
- Be proactive - have this discussion BEFORE a public meeting or event
- If the issue still comes during the meeting, remind participants this was discussed prior to the meeting and how it was addressed



# Dealing with hidden opposition

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- Hidden opposition is often NOT hidden and easy to see if you are looking for the right signs
- Affected stakeholders will go outside your “process” if they feel there are better ways to meet their needs
- Open and REGULAR dialogue makes “hidden” opposition more difficult
- Look for well-established as well as innovative ways to meet stakeholder needs
- Make participating in the process more attractive than not!



# Knowing how and when to change course to address difficulties

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- If the tone of the meeting is changing, try to determine what is going wrong before reacting or intervening:
  - is there frustration and anger
  - are some parties dominating or grabbing power
  - is bad behavior or emotion dominating discussions
- Each of these conditions merits a different approach
- Take a break if necessary to get back on track



# Session 4: Intervening to address explosive interactions

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- Using key facilitation tools at your disposal
- Addressing difficulty and/or hostility when it emerges:
  - Interventions to address process difficulties
  - Interventions to address disruptive behaviors
- Knowing how to use different interventions for large group settings versus one-on-one interactions



# Using key facilitation tools at your disposal

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- As facilitator you guide the group's interactions - take charge!
- Remain aware of people/personalities to anticipate issues or difficulties before they emerge
- Know how and when to employ tools and techniques:
  - Ground rules
  - Non-verbal and body language
  - Flip charts and visual aides - know how to use these
  - Slowing the pace of the discussions
  - Meeting breaks or suspension of meeting



# Interventions to address process difficulties

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- Interventions can be used to address process issues:
  - Progress is too slow or too fast
  - Some parties can't understand or keep up with the discussion
  - Key parties are no longer participating
- If necessary take a break and "re-group" with your team
  - Seek out key participants and ask if they have suggestions for what may not be working
  - Don't be afraid to change course, move on, and come back to this topic later



# Interventions to address disruptive behaviors

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- Disruptive or bad behavior can include:
  - Dominators who want to control the discussion
  - People engaged in sidebar conversations
  - People who tell war stories
  - people who make personal attacks
  - People who are angry or emotional,
  - people who wander off the topic
  - Non-participants



# Interventions to use in large group meetings

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- Disruptive behaviors require a strong facilitator who is not afraid to intervene before the situation gets worse
  - Always be respectful, do not over-step your role as facilitator
  - Begin interventions gently and escalate as needed
  - Look for the group's support when you need to move forward and leave the disruptions behind
- Come to every meeting prepared for the worst - review tip sheets, tough questions, past experiences with other EPA team members if there is a history of disruption



# Interventions to use in one-on-one interactions

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- Be yourself, listen like a friend would - don't assume you know the real issue
- Having the "right" answer does not mean you will be effective in communication
- RATHER ask for more information
- Answer the question(s) asked BEFORE conveying your message
- In the face of incorrect information or accusations - state you disagree with the conclusions being offered
- In the face of attempts to draw you into an argument - STOP TALKING!
- NEVER stay in a dangerous situation - state you are uncomfortable - and leave



# Session 5: Using facilitation skills in agency work

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- Understanding how to serve as an EPA facilitator for internal agency meetings, and as an EPA facilitator with external parties
- Working effectively as a team in public settings
- Finding opportunities to improve your facilitation skills



# Facilitation skills in agency work

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- Make sure you understand the concept of being a "neutral" and that you can meet this need when this is part of your assignment
- Seek agreement for all parties that you - as an EPA staff person - can be viewed as a credible and un-biased facilitator
- Carefully define your role for participants so they understand the role you have been asked to play as a "facilitator"



# Working effectively as a team

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- Take the time to practice as a "team" before public events
- Assign specific roles/responsibilities to each team member
- Make sure "partner agencies" come as prepared as you are
- Don't allow anyone to "wing it" - if one person is not prepared everyone will look bad
- FOLLOWUP with any commitments made



# Using and improving your facilitation skills

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- Look for opportunities to practice
- Develop your skill base and practice your facilitation skills wherever possible -inside and outside your job
- Offer assistance to: develop agendas, serve as record keeper or prepare meeting summaries; monitor followup activities
- Seek opportunities outside the agency if needed